

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

State of Wisconsin

DATE: July 18, 1996

Attachment V

FILE REF:

TO: DNR Supervisors

FROM: George Meyer AD/5

George

SUBJECT: SMT Decision on Decentralization of Plan Review Function

I would like to share with you a significant decision made by the Senior Management Team (SMT) this week as part of our regular monthly meeting.

In recent weeks, the proposed decentralization of department engineering construction plan review in wastewater, water supply, and solid and hazardous waste has undergone rigorous discussion.

Valid arguments for decentralizing have been made. In truth, the operating philosophy of this department for the last twenty years has been very strongly in favor of decentralization. The citizens of our state believe that good department decisions are made close to home; I have heard this in my numerous meetings with the public, the Natural Resources Board -- appointed to represent many areas of the state -- hears it monthly, and Grant Thornton heard it loudly in the extensive citizen involvement that went into formulating the reorganization plan. Former Secretaries Earl and Besadny and I have all worked in the direction of getting department managers into the field and close to the citizens of the state.

But I have heard equally compelling arguments for centralization of plan review from supervisors and primary customers of plan review services. Those arguments include:

- **Type and location of work:** Plan review occurs in an office and does not require physical closeness to a site. It does however benefit from physical closeness to others doing the same work so that knowledge and experience can be quickly conveyed.
- **Staffing levels:** The number of staff available for plan review does not support a decentralized operation.
- **Customer response:** The primary customers of plan review support the current status of centralized plan review. They are concerned about quality, consistency and timeliness of review decisions in a decentralized operation.
- **Efficiency /Logistics:** Limited staff in regions will not allow work to be efficiently managed during extended absences such as vacancies, vacations, sick leave, or during temporary increases in a region's workload. Transferring review of engineering plans awaiting construction from one region to another to compensate

for these circumstances adds considerable overhead and results in possible lengthy delays for the customer. In addition, annual plan review work is unpredictable and very unequally distributed in the state; the Northern Region accounts for only about 5 percent of wastewater plan review. Accommodating such differences is more easily accomplished in a centralized review function.

Senior Management reviewed a number of options for addressing these concerns including centralizing all plan review and supervision, decentralizing all plan review and supervision, or considering a hybrid of maintaining some centralization while still accommodating the need and the goal to get decision-making more localized.

DECISION: The decision made did not come easily and is very narrow in its focus and the positions it affects. However, it does allow the agency to deal with the need for decentralized decision-making and current staff and customer concerns. Furthermore, it provides for more detailed analysis of our direction and options.

1. Twenty-eight existing engineering and hydrogeologist positions in wastewater, water supply and solid and hazardous waste involved in construction plan review and previously identified for decentralization will remain stationed in central office but will be assigned to regional teams and will be supervised by the regions. These positions were selected because they work primarily with consultants typically located in Madison, are not called on to visit facilities, and must have access to plans, specifications, and innovation and technology resources based in Madison. (This group is unique in that it does not work with plants and structures that are already constructed and geographically placed in the state, but rather with plans for structures yet to be built.)

2. A Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Group, chaired by an outside consultant, will be convened to develop recommendations in the following areas:

- How should engineering plan review function in the agency in the future? Is there a better way to do plan review? Do we have opportunities for streamlining and efficiency?
- Should the plan review function be further decentralized from the structure outlined in this decision?
- How do we maintain region-to-region consistency given regional supervision of plan review?
- How can plan review best be incorporated into eco-system management?

The CQI group will be empowered to comment on the technical aspects of this decision, with the guideline that decentralization remains the goal of this agency, the Natural

Resources Board and the reorganization. I expect a progress report in three to six months.

We have not yet determined the procedure for nominating team members but will share information on expressing interest and participating as soon as possible.

This decision affects a small group of people, and I know it raises questions in the minds of all employees. Are we committed to the reorganization? Yes, we are more than ever. I met with a number of central office engineering employees this morning to discuss this decision and the events leading up to it.

I felt it was important to tell them and you why public participation and getting as many decision-makers as we can close to the public (decentralization) are so important to the future of DNR, and why these have been overriding goals of the reorganization. The public is our agency's strength. Wisconsin's citizens BELIEVE in environmental protection. It is ingrained in their values. Perhaps 90 per cent of our citizens so value a clean environment, they are willing to use their votes and their voices to make sure environmental and resource protection here are never compromised. If the public agenda moves away from that value, the citizens will bring it right back. Their participating in department efforts, helping us set direction and goals, and working with our employees on the local level assure this agency can fulfill its mission. This is a positive goal of the reorganization; it does not solve a problem but rather helps us build on a strength.

Does the decision on plan review apply to other functions? Only, but only, if the same rigorous criteria as have been applied to these plan review functions can be met. From our early analysis, very few -- if any -- positions fit into the same category. The Natural Resources Board is committed to decentralization and will not permit us to retreat on any broad scale from that goal, even if the Senior Management Team ever opted away from the goal of decentralized decision-making.

It is our intent to continue reorganization implementation. Many employees want the New Staff Assignments process to be completed quickly. We have compressed the placement process as much as humanly possible while maintaining opportunities for employees to make decisions on their careers and personal lives. We are working to eliminate the great discomfort people are feeling about the uncertainty of their personal situations and to live up to the promises made early on in the reorganization: no forced moves, no layoffs and no loss of pay. We have gone to extraordinary measures to keep those promises, and we are still committed to them.

We knew reorganization plans would require mid-course corrections. This is one of them. I remain committed to working with you to put together a strong agency for the future. Look for further information about the CQI group forming on this issue.

cc: Senior Management Team
Debra Martinelli HR/5